

“0” is the magic number

Project Zero expands statewide

All 83 counties participate in welfare-to-work project

Governor John Engler said Aug. 30 that Project Zero will expand statewide in October, when the last 15 Michigan counties join the state’s landmark welfare reform project.

On Oct. 1, Project Zero expanded statewide to the remaining 15 counties to include some of Michigan’s most highly populated areas—Arenac, Bay, Clare, Gratiot, Huron, Ingham, Isabella, Jackson, Lapeer, Macomb, Muskegon, Osceola, Saginaw, Tuscola, and Washtenaw counties.

“In state government we once believed moving people from welfare to work was one of our

greatest dilemmas,” said Engler.

“Now through Project Zero, we know any community, regardless of its geographic location, distance to jobs, or the makeup of its people, can achieve the goal that everyone works and earns income.”

Established in 1996 as a pilot program in six sites, Project Zero was expanded to 12 sites in nine counties in its second year. In October 1998 the project was expanded to 35 sites, then to 49 counties and 70 sites in October 1999 and to 68 counties in June 2000. With the October expansion Project Zero is now carried out

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FIA appeals drug test ruling

Court upholds restraining order against legislated testing program for assistance applicants

LANSING —Citing a recent study by Columbia University’s National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Family Independence Agency director Douglas E. Howard said the state will appeal a ruling stopping the agency from implementing drug testing for public assistance applicants.

The ruling was handed down by federal District Judge Victoria A. Roberts, who issued a preliminary injunction barring the agency from continuing its statutorily mandated testing program.

“A recent report also found that substance abuse was ranked third out of seven by national welfare administrators as a barrier to welfare reform, behind low skill levels and transportation, and ahead of child care availability, job scarcity, poor participant motivation or attitude, and domestic violence,” Howard said Sept. 6.

“It is clear that something must be done to help these families break their dependency on substances and welfare, and I believe that Michigan has chosen the best path to address this national issue. In addition, drug-free families are stronger families and they are safer for children and communities.”

Michigan began a mandatory drug testing pilot program in three

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FIA Icon for September-October 2000

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Intercepted letters

To: **Douglas Howard**
Date: **Aug. 21, 2000**
Subject: **Adopting abused children, article**

I would like to extend a sincere thank you for your letter to the editor of the Newaygo County Today newspaper regarding Michigan's stand on adoption. When the article regarding adopting abused children was run, we here at Newaygo County Family Independence Agency were shocked and frustrated, not only for the child in the article and the breach of confidentiality, but for all our children who have come from abused homes and now desire to be adopted. I for one believe that foster care and adoption works and am very pleased to know that FIA has a director who feels the same way and is in support of field staff and the work we are doing.

Thank you for your public support and for giving one little boy a voice.

Donna Lieffers

Adoption Specialist

Newaygo County FIA, Newaygo

To: **Douglas E. Howard**
Date: **Aug. 22, 2000**
Subject: **Michigan TANF participation rates**

I am pleased to inform you that Michigan successfully met both the overall and the two-parent work participation rates for fiscal year 1999 under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. After applying your state's caseload reduction credit to the required overall rate for FY

1999...Michigan achieved an overall participation rate of 43.8 percent. When we applied Michigan's caseload reduction credit...to the FY 1999 two-parent rate...you achieved a rate of 69.1 percent. Congratulations on your success. Mounting evidence demonstrates states have transformed welfare into work-based programs and significantly increased the number of recipients going to work. These increases are reflected both in the TANF work participation rates states are achieving and in...employment...of individuals who were on assistance. We applaud you on your success in moving families into work.

Joyce A. Thomas

AFC Midwest Hub Director

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Chicago

FIA appeals drug test ruling from page 1

sites in October 1999 with two other sites to begin in April 2000. Pursuant to state law, adult applicants for cash assistance in pilot sites were required to take a urine test using the same screening process used by state employees.

The pilot project, which would have been the precursor to statewide testing for assistance applicants, was halted Nov. 6, 1999 when the plaintiffs obtained a temporary restraining order.

"In a recent study, my colleagues across the nation ranked the existence of substance dependency as high as 20 percent or more," said Howard. "When we ran our pilot briefly last fall, we found just over 10 percent of applicants for cash assistance tested positive as opposed to the approximately one percent of state employee job applicants who test positive each year. Any welfare applicants who tested positive would have been referred for treatment as a condition of eligibility."



FIA Icon

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Family Independence Agency*

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From the Director

By Douglas E. Howard

Director, Family Independence Agency

The reason we do what we do

The first draft of my column for this issue was complete and I had penciled in some changes the day before I participated in a Project Zero celebration in Delta County. The article was on welfare reform, looking at where we've been and reflecting on the need to put our success in perspective as the future of welfare reform is debated in Congress over the next two years.

At the Delta County event, one of the speakers was pulling triple duty. She was there as both the news reporter and the cameraperson for a local TV station. She also was a special guest speaker to tell us about her experience with welfare and her efforts to improve the quality of life for her and her family. She graciously agreed that we could print her speech.

As the future of welfare reform is debated nationally, it is important to put a face on welfare reform. The successes we have seen are first and foremost the successes of individuals and families. They are successes second for the community. Government stands third in line. While the passion and emotion cannot be reflected as well in written form, I believe you will see Deanna gave a face to welfare reform in ways better than many, maybe *any*, of us can.

Until that day I never experienced a group of 100 adults stay so absolutely quiet and motionless during a speech. Following is her speech, done and presented in her words. I think you will see why we were moved.

■■■

"Good morning and thank you for inviting me. I guess the reason I'm here today is because people consider me a success. I've come from working part-time jobs and receiving aid, to working a full-time job with benefits and being self-sufficient. But if that's why I'm here, then I think we have it wrong, because I don't consider that my success. What I have done to be proud of has very little to do with money or a good job.

"I have succeeded because I made something come from nothing, I made a dream a reality, and for someone who once believed she was worthless, I'm as thoroughly amazed at myself as you may be. Life is not easy for anyone, and the same has been true for me.

"Almost from birth I learned that life is a struggle to survive. One of my earliest memories is of a time when we were homeless and living in a pop-up camper in a park near where we had run out of gas. I remember my mother praying that they wouldn't come and kick us out because we didn't have money to leave.

"I remember my mom giving my sister and I a nickel. She told us to go ask the two men who were camped down the beach if they would sell us two pieces of bread. Those two men gave us an entire loaf of bread, and a pack of pickle loaf bologna, and they let us keep the nickel...and my mom cried.

"And I remember that a week later we were able to leave that park because my mom

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Ontonagon County woman honored as July Achiever

Upper Peninsula resident earns award before friends, family and co-workers

By Marie Kinnunen, Family Independence Manager
Ontonagon County Family Independence Agency, Ontonagon
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SILVER CITY, Mich.—Lorie Fooce of Bergland was honored as the Family Independence Agency's 81st Achiever of the Month July 21 at a ceremony at Paul's Restaurant in Silver City.

Douglas E. Howard, director of the Michigan Family Independence Agency, presented Lorie with her Achiever of the Month plaque at the ceremony that followed a luncheon held in her honor.

"Lorie is the eighty first recipient of the Achiever of the Month award," said Howard. "She is being honored for her determined and intense pursuit of independence from the welfare system."

Also participating in the program to honor Lorie were Dale MacDonald, director of the Gogebic-Ontonagon County FIA; Cindy Knabe, program specialist with Michigan Works; and Hope M. Steldt, LPN, Lorie's co-worker from Gogebic Medical Care Facility. I was also pleased and proud to be part of the ceremony honoring Lorie for her achievements.

At the event she received other citations signed by elected officials representing the Western Upper Peninsula—state Rep. Paul Tesonovich of L'anse and state Sen. Don Koivisto from Ironwood. Fooce, who is a former Family Independence Program recipient, received congratulations from these officials and many



Lorie Fooce

others for her personal efforts to move toward self-sufficiency from public assistance.

The Lorie story

Lorie Fooce first came to the FIA in August 1994 when she had just separated from her husband and had four young girls to care for. Lorie had several part-time and seasonal jobs over the years, but was unable to make a living wage to support her family.

With assistance from the FIA she received help in the form of Family Independence Program benefits (then called AFDC), food stamps, child day care, and Emergency Assistance program.

Despite the seriousness of her situation, she was hesitant about coming to the FIA," said Howard. "It was very difficult for Lorie to accept assistance. She is very independent and believes strongly in being self-

sufficient."

In 1999, she saw an ad in a local newspaper for certified nurse's aide classes that were starting at the Gogebic Medical Care Facility in Wakefield, a city near the Wisconsin border. She inquired about this at the Western Upper Peninsula Work First agency and was signed up for the course. She successfully completed the course and was immediately hired by Gogebic Medical Care Facility as a certified Nurses Aide in April 1999.

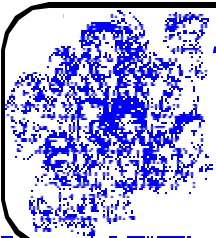
Today Lorie—who works full-time as a nurse's aide at the facility—is making good on her effort to shed public assistance. She continues to receive support with child day care and medical assistance for her children. Her FIP case is closed.

"One of the greatest benefits of our achiever program has been its influence in helping employers look more closely at our customers as future employees," said Howard. "Lorie is a fine example for others to emulate, and her story has the potential to inspire individuals who may be encouraged and motivated by her success."

A long road traveled and story told

Lorie wrote a history of her life, struggles and accomplishments she read aloud at the achiever ceremony.

In this touching story, Lorie elaborated on her struggles in life as a



To Strengthen Michigan Families Achiever of the Month



Helping Lorie celebrate her big day were family members. Looking at the photo from left to right: Front row (seated) Jennifer Smith (Lorie's niece); Cassandra Foose (Lorie's daughter); Lorie Foose; Jessica Foose (Lorie's daughter—head on Lorie's shoulder). Back row: Deanna Foose (Lorie's daughter); John Smith (Lorie's brother) and Samantha Foose (Lorie's daughter).

single parent and her difficulties in school as she has been diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She shared that she had to study very hard in the certified nursing aide course and never received a test score lower than 98 out of 100.

Lorie thanked those who helped her to make it off of assistance, including her parents who helped with car repairs and child care. She also gave special credit to Jim Saari from Western U. P. Work First for all the assistance given with training and supportive services.

She thanked her caseworker at Ontonagon County FIA, Joan Steber, and her friends and co-workers for always being supportive on the road to

self-sufficiency. Steber said Lorie was never hesitant to make a decision she thought best for her daughters.

"Lorie is a very hard worker," said Steber. "She has done seasonal work and a variety of part-time jobs. Basically she does whatever it takes to provide for her family."

The Michigan Works Agency also honored Lorie earlier this year in Lansing for her achievements. Lorie said she loves her job at Gogebic Medical Care Facility. She said she feels good when she can walk into the "crabbies" patient's room and make them smile.

All who participated in honoring her agreed that Lorie has overcome tremendous odds and has



Located only 6 miles from Silver City, Porcupine Mountains State Park is the entree to visit Michigan's only mountain range. Rising to a height of 1,958 feet above sea level, Summit Peak is the highest point in "the Porkies", which features Lake of the Clouds and other tourist attractions.

The Porcupine Mountains are located in western Ontonagon County



made a remarkable journey toward self-sufficiency. Lorie said her oldest daughter used to say she wanted to be on welfare when she grew up. Now, she said, all four daughters want to be nurses, following their mother's good example.

"Lorie had the initiative to use what was available to her and go to the limit of what we want our customers to do," said Dale MacDonald, director of Gogebic-Ontonagon Co. FIA.

"She wanted an education, she wanted to work, and she wanted to make a difference and set a good example. We at FIA are extremely proud of Lorie's achievements."



The reason we do what we do

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sold her body—one pint at a time, because in those days you could sell your blood.

“My early days were filled with fear. Fear of hunger, fear of the dark and the cold, fear of my mother’s screams, and fear that one day my dad would kill her.

“And later my days were filled with shame. For my shabby clothes and for being friendless and alone at school and pretending it didn’t hurt. And then finally, after 14 different schools since kindergarten, I walked across that stage to receive my diploma when I was 17 years old, and 8½ months pregnant. Who would ever believe that I could be anything?

“After nearly four years of working odd jobs and getting welfare, it wasn’t until I, too, was homeless and living in a shelter with my son, at one of the lowest points in my adult life...that an idea, a very strange and peculiar thought came into my head.

“And the thought was why not me? If this is it, if this is my one life, and my one chance to live it, why can’t I make it be what I want? Life is going to be hard, this I know, but why get to the end of it and look back and realize that I hadn’t reached for a single thing.

I don’t want regrets when it’s too late to do anything about it.

“And why should I? The only one who can hold me back is myself. It took me 22 years to realize that, and to know with some conviction that I am somebody if I choose to be.

“And when I asked for your help, even after four years in the system, you had enough faith in me to help send me to school, even though I could have gotten some kind of job that would have supported us.

“You believed in me enough to let me find a life, not just a job. You gave me enough room to reach for dreams that may have been impossible to reach for if you hadn’t given me a chance.

“I didn’t tell you my story so that you could pity me. I told you this because after all your hard work, you deserve to know what my true success is, and what it is that you have helped me to overcome.

“You have helped to change my life, and I’m not afraid anymore, and I’m not ashamed. I’m proud, and I’m strong, and for once I have my own power. We have done well, you and I.

“So on the days when you’ve worked too many hours and you’re swamped in piles of paperwork, you’re frustrated and it all seems pointless and endless...for my sake, I want you to stop, sit back, let the strain ease out of your shoulders, take a deep, calming breath. And think of someone, think of me. And then reach around, pat yourself on the back, and say to yourself, “Damn! I did a good job.”

Deanna Bennett giving her address and working.



—Deanna Bennett

Hospitals get incentive money for establishing paternity

Part of the \$20 million federal bonus payment Michigan received for reducing out-of-wedlock births will be given as incentives to birthing hospitals who increase their paternity establishment rates. Birthing hospitals provide paternity establishment services free of charge as part of the birth registration process.

In Sept. 8 letters to birthing hospitals, Governor John Engler announced that \$1.7 million will be awarded to birthing hospitals for their 1999 paternity establishment rate as well as a bonus payment to hospitals that increased paternity establishment from 1998-99. The incentive payments range from \$364 to \$117,463. Hospitals will receive the payments by the end of September.

Birthing hospitals are encouraged to use the payments to: offer paternity establishment services seven days a week with multiple shift coverage; provide outreach to prenatal clinics and doctor’s offices; and implement other practices and procedures.

“The continued success of welfare reform is linked to increasing establishment of paternity and parents meeting their responsibilities to support their children,” said FIA director Douglas E. Howard. “This will help us accomplish these goals.”

Funding is also available for birthing hospitals to purchase computers and printers to assist with the electronic birth registration and affidavit process.

For a list of the hospitals receiving incentive payments and the amounts, see this news release on the FIA website: www.mfia.state.mi.us

Week of the dynamic dozen

12 Project Zero programs hit “zero” in one week in August 65 project sites hit zero through mid-September

Gov. John Engler announced Aug. 9 that during the first week in August, 12 different Project Zero welfare reform sites around Michigan hit “zero”—setting a record.

The 12 sites reaching zero between July 31 and August 4 are programs serving Benzie, Crawford, Dickinson, Emmet, Gladwin, Leelanau, Oceana, Mackinac and Presque Isle counties and three Wayne County FIA districts —Taylor, Kercheval-Townsend and Maddelein. The latter two sites serve Detroit neighborhoods.

Project Zero expands statewide

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in all 83 counties at 104 county and Wayne County district offices.

It is a collaborative welfare reform program delivered through state and local partners. State partners include the Family Independence Agency, Michigan departments of Career Development, Transportation, Community Health, and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

“The Michigan Department of Career Development is ready to help these last 15 counties reach their Project Zero goals,” said Dr. Barbara Bolin, director of the Michigan Department of Career Development. “The many job training and career preparation programs that we offer, in cooperation with Michigan Works Agencies throughout the state, enable us to effectively assist people in making the transition from unemployment to good jobs and careers.”

Bolin’s agency provides funds for Michigan Works Agencies, many of which contract with local Work First providers, while Community Health offers longer term health care options for Project Zero customers.

“We are proud to be a partner in Project Zero sites across the state,” said Michigan Department of Community Health director James K. Haveman Jr. “Project Zero opens the doors to those who want to work, further their education and move into independence.”

The official start date for new counties is Oct. 1. New counties will kick off Project Zero with local events that month. Project Zero sites use state and local partnerships to help customers get and keep jobs.

“Transportation services are key to making Project Zero successful,” said state Transportation Director James R. DeSana. “Our partnership with other state and local agencies is critical to coordinating necessary services for Michigan families. The lack of transportation can be a serious barrier to holding a job.”

The goal of Project Zero is to reduce target Family Independence Program cases that have been open for 60 days or longer, and expected to work. When all the target cases in a county or project site have earned income, that area is said to have reached “zero.” Through mid-September 66 of 89 sites had reached zero at least one time including 16 of 23 Wayne County districts.

“Project Zero sites have been more than effective because communities build lasting partnerships and everyone works to achieve the same goal,” said FIA director Douglas E. Howard. “Project Zero is our way of doing business. This proven model incorporates communities as decision-making partners and lets everyone share in the success.”

“For a dozen Project Zero sites to reach their goal in one week is absolutely outstanding,” said Engler. “Unprecedented numbers of people in Michigan now know first-hand what it means to start on the road toward self-sufficiency thanks to Project Zero.”

The governor used the occasion to thank public assistance recipients and state workers for their good work.

“Congratulations to the welfare recipients who are working and to the Family Independence Agency employees who have worked so hard to achieve this success,” he said.

Crawford and Dickinson counties and the Wayne County Kercheval-Townsend and Maddelein districts reached zero for the first time in August, while the others reached zero at least one time prior to the first week of August.

Meanwhile, Project Zero counties continued to rack up days where all target FIP cases were working and earning income. Since the “dynamic dozen” week, these counties reached zero for the first time (date of occurrence): Ogemaw (Aug. 8); Wayne County Grand River-Warren district and Allegan County (both Aug. 17); Ontonagon (Aug. 23), Otsego (Sept. 7) and Luce (Sept. 13).

Many counties continue to make “zero” a regular occurrence. Through September 2000, the Benzie-Leelanau county Project Zero program was the record-holder for consecutive months reaching zero, having done so for 21 months. The Grand Traverse County Project Zero program reached zero Sept. 13, making it 12 straight months where they reached zero at least one day.

Medicaid reimbursement up \$350 million this year

Michigan continues to improve health care services

Customers report high satisfaction with managed care services

By James K. Haveman, Jr., Director

Michigan Department of Community Health

■ Michigan Department of Community Health administers the state Medicaid program, while Family Independence Agency staff throughout Michigan determine eligibility for the low-income health care program, which is funded by both the state and federal governments.

In June, a daily newspaper in Detroit published a series of stories on health care in the city. These stories are part of a continuing critical review of the state Medicaid program, its ability to reimburse physicians for care, and the overall ability of the way Michigan state government participates as a provider of health care for low-income citizens. In my opinion, these stories did not offer an accurate portrayal of Michigan's move to managed care for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Through programs including Medicaid, Healthy Kids and MICHild, Michigan has made an enormous investment in health care for low-income and uninsured families. The fiscal year 2001 budget, which starts Oct. 1, boosts spending for the state's Medicaid program nearly \$350 million over last year, with more than two-thirds of the increase targeted for rate increases for doctors, hospitals and health care providers for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Michigan devotes more than \$1 of every \$5 of the state General Fund to Medicaid even though Medicaid is a small purchaser of health care. The majority of health care is purchased through the federal Medicare program or private insurance. Medicaid represents only 8 percent of hospital revenue in Michigan and pays its fair share of hospital costs. Michigan's Senate Fiscal Agency reported that hospitals actually make money on Medicaid.

A bone of contention raised in the articles was hospital closures in



James K. Haveman, Jr.

Detroit, which some link directly to perceived inadequate Medicaid reimbursement. However, the hospitals cited in the articles closed because the corporations that owned them realized there were too many hospitals and too few patients. And of patients residing in those hospitals, Medicaid reimbursed care for a relatively small group.

On any given day, over 45 percent of Michigan hospital beds are empty. Of the hospitals cited in the newspaper stories, data shows Saratoga Hospital had only 38.65 percent of its beds filled and of these, only 7 percent were Medicaid patients. Mercy of Detroit filled 63.09 percent of its beds and of these only 24.27 percent were Medicaid patients. In Michigan, hospital executives are among the highest paid professionals in the state. In fact,

while Mercy lost more than \$8.4 million in 1998, the CEO of Mercy Health Services got a 14 percent pay raise. Sinai Hospital filled 63.91 percent of its beds and of these only 12.67 percent were Medicaid patients. In spite of making \$4,680,991 in profit in 1998, Sinai chose to close.

The Medicaid program is dedicated to assuring its beneficiaries get the highest quality medical care the health care delivery system has to offer. Before moving to managed care, Medicaid consumers were more likely to wait to receive treatment in the emergency room than build a relationship with their personal physician. Today, we know Medicaid customers are happier using personal physicians than using emergency rooms, and they are pleased with the services they receive through Medicaid reimbursement.

The 1999 Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report, released in February, focused on 22 Michigan health plans serving adult Medicaid beneficiaries in managed care and 21 health plans serving child Medicaid beneficiaries in managed care. The survey focused on getting needed care, getting care quickly, how well doctors communicate, courteous and helpful office staff and customer service.

The survey results indicate persons receiving Medicaid are pleased with the services they receive not only from their doctor but also from their Qualified Health Plan. The survey of adult Medicaid beneficiaries found:

- 77 percent gave their personal doctor or nurse an 80 percent or higher rating.
- 77 percent gave their medical specialist an 80 percent or higher rating.
- 70 percent gave all doctors and other health providers overall an 80 percent or higher rating.

- 79 percent gave their child's personal doctor or nurse an 80 percent or higher rating.
- 76 percent gave their child's medical specialist an 80 percent or higher rating.
- 74 percent gave all doctors and other health providers of their child an 80 percent or higher rating.

samples and the child survey included 3,680 samples. It was a mail survey with significant telephone follow up.

We hope community hospitals and physicians continue to look at the way they do business and join us and other purchasers of health care to develop a health care system that is efficient, effective and provides the

Of adult recipients in Medicaid-supported Qualified Health Plan programs responding to a 1999 poll, 77 percent gave their personal doctor or nurse an 80 percent or higher rating, 77 percent gave their medical specialist an 80 percent or higher rating, and 70 percent gave all doctors and other health providers overall an 80 percent or higher rating.

- 69 percent reported that getting care was not a problem and 75 percent reported they usually or always received care quickly.
- 83 percent reported that their doctors usually or always communicate well and 87 percent reported that office staff was usually or always courteous and helpful.
- 65 percent were advised to quit smoking on at least one visit.
- 62 percent gave their health plan an 80 percent or higher rating.

The survey of child Medicaid beneficiaries found:

- 80 percent reported doctors usually or always discussed the child's behavior and growth with the parent.

- 77 percent reported that getting care for their child was not a problem and 80 percent said their child usually or always received care quickly.
- 88 percent reported their child's doctor usually or always communicate well and 79 percent said doctors always or usually explained things so children could understand.
- 66 percent of parents gave their child's health plan an 80 percent or higher rating.

The Department of Community Health commissioned the survey from Market Facts, a survey company specializing in health care and other consumer satisfaction surveys. Their adult survey included 6,915 final

high quality outcomes that Michigan citizens deserve.

■ For more information consult the Department of Community Health website: www.mdch.state.mi.us



Hot potatoes a success

Series of training conferences help FIA staff better translate food stamp policy, reduce errors and help customers

By Anne Sinicropi Sigourney

FIA Family Independence Services Administration, Lansing

Telephone (517) 335-6291

“Hot Potatoes 2000” is history but won’t soon be forgotten by many of its participants.

After 23 two-day sessions at 12 different locations with more than 4,200 FIA field workers—mostly family independence specialists and eligibility specialists—participating, the series of food stamp accuracy conferences known as “hot potatoes” was declared a roaring success by its planners and attendees.

Funded by federal food stamp reinvestment dollars, or funds the FIA dedicates to lower food stamp error rate calculations, the conference included workshops that dealt with review of policy issues, skill building in areas of documentation and interviewing, and health and wellness issues.

Fifteen trainers from the FIA Office of Financial Assistance Programs and Training Services Division presented workshops with assistance from their managers and administrative support staff. The “potato” theme was cleverly played out in various conference workshops such as “Fried Potatoes” (stress management), “Mashed Pota-

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Above: FIA trainer Deryl Gardner offers instruction in the workshop “New Potatoes for New Attitudes”, a session on interviewing.

Dear FIA specialists,
We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all that so enthusiastically participated in the Hot Potatoes Conference. We tried to make the conference relevant, informative **and** fun. And, judging from your evaluations and other feedback, it appears we succeeded!

It was an awesome responsibility and wonderful opportunity to prepare, organize and present Hot Potatoes for all FIS and ES staff. We are grateful to have been able to touch your lives in such a positive way. Back at the office, we hope your experiences at the workshops will help keep your spirits up as well as make your jobs a little easier.

Sincerely,
Sandy Zwemer and Anne Wineman
for “Hot Potatoes” trainers, managers and support staff



"Hot Potatoes" trainers seated (left-right): Cindy Alsup, Mary Ann Antoinetti, Dawn Callahan, Mary Gartland and Stacie Gibson. **Standing (left-right):** Jeannie Young, Deryl Gardner, Cheryl Thompson, Linda Hayton, Judy Ansuini, Randy Friday, Debra Royal, Linda Baird, Bonnie Reno, Phyllis Edwards and Marisa Foehr. **Not pictured:** Mary Jo Beshara, Deb Berne and Sheila Barbour.

Hot potatoes a success *continued*

toes" (workload management), and "Potato Salad" (group composition).

Conference participants were rewarded with prizes ranging from bags of potato chips to bubble blower pens to tote bags.

"In 25 years, I have never attended as good a conference, with nifty portfolios," said Grace Carafelly from Macomb County FIA. Described by attenders as well organized in both content and presentation, the conference was interactive, informative and a satisfying experience for everyone involved.

Many positive postings were entered on the FIA Intranet web board, including one from Rob Sievert of Livingston County. "The task of teaching food stamp policy is difficult, but they added enough lightheartedness and humor to keep people interested," Sievert said.

Participants commended training staff for the time, effort and personal sacrifices they made during conferences, which were held from May through September.

Lawrence Rozenbaum from Wayne County said: "The organization involved in this project was masterful. The trainers were unbounding in energy and enthusiasm. Compliments and applause to all planners, organizers, trainers and implementers." Keon Luzod of Wayne County said, "I found myself going home invigorated and hopeful." He describes the conference as "lively, entertaining, relevant and informative."



Above: FIA employees (from left) Barb Price, Lori Lindsey and Helen Anderson worked the registration and help desk at "Hot Potatoes" seminars.

State Disbursement Unit centralizes child support collections

Unit under FIA management benefits employers with child support payees

“Central bank” collects payments, sends to Friend of the Court for payment

■ For more information please go to this website: www.misdu.com



LANSING—Michigan employers now have an opportunity to simplify child support payments for their employees.

Employers can now send one payment to a central location for all their workers' Michigan child support obligations. Rather than sending multiple payments to individual county Friends of the Court, employers send a single payment to the Michigan State Disbursement Unit, or SDU.

Housed in Lansing, the SDU is the single physical unit responsible for the receipting of child support payments. Established to meet federal child support regulations, the SDU was required by the federal welfare reform act of 1996.

The SDU was authorized by state legislation that became effective in November 1999 when Gov. John Engler signed a 12-bill package that provides for the state to collect and disburse all child support payments. The bills (House Bills 4816-27) created a central State Disbursement Unit and provided that money paid from noncustodial parents or garnished from their wages go to the central collection point.

The laws require the SDU to pay the custodial parent within two days of receiving a payment and the

bills spelled out cooperation between the Family Independence Agency and the county Friend of the Court offices during the transition to the new system.

“The Friends of the Court have handled the receipting process in 64 locations throughout the state,” said Wally Dutkowski, director of the FIA Office of Child Support. “They process collections of over \$1.3 billion annually in child support payments. Each of the 64 offices is staffed to provide a full range of services to its clients, and they have established responsive relationships with employers to coordinate collections.

“The state’s approach is to leverage what’s good about the Michigan system but support welfare reform and adhere to federal requirements by doing what makes sense for Michigan.”

The SDU gives employers the opportunity to submit their monthly payment electronically to only one location instead of 64 different sites. Three options allow companies to make only one transaction per payroll—Electronic Funds Transfer/Electronic Data Interchange, Debit Web Site, or diskette processing.

“Electronic payment is the wave of the future and more and

more businesses rely on it,” said Renee Owings, the FIA project director for SDU. “They have come to recognize its many benefits and the SDU offers those same benefits for payment of child support.”

Owings said employers advocated for centralized child support payment processing and the SDU has put it in place.

“Child support is a tense arena for employers and the SDU is designed to make payment as easy as possible for them,” she said. “It gives employers choices; if they want they can submit paper checks, as many of them have done in the past. But we think that electronic payment will save them time and aggravation.”

Owings said the SDU’s role is important but limited, something employers will come to understand more fully as more participate.

“The SDU does not replace the Friend of the Court,” she said. “Friends of the Court continue to be responsible for all aspects of the child support system except payment receipting and processing.”

Michigan moved cautiously to implement the SDU to ensure it effectively serves children, custodial parents, payers and employers, said Mike Scieszka, chief information officer for the FIA. Scieszka’s administration oversaw development and implementation of the SDU.

“Developing and implementing systems right takes time,” he said.

He said Michigan’s child support system received a federal

continues next page

Famed prognosticator visits FIA's conference

Late night talk show parody gives old messages new names using Motown themes

During August, Michigan hosted the "Big Ten" conference on food stamp payment accuracy in Detroit. The event involved staff from Midwestern states in the federal USDA region including states that have most of the Big Ten schools. Other conference attendees included federal officials and guests from other states.

FIA director Douglas Howard was giving welcoming remarks to an audience of several hundred state and federal staff when Chuck "Ed" Jones interrupted to ask him if he could demonstrate the predictive powers of an agency director by playing "Carnac." In his business life, "Ed" is director of reengineering and quality control for the Family Independence Agency.

Together, Ed and Carnac played out the well-known skit made famous by Johnny Carson and Ed McMahon on their late night talk show. The context was the language of the food stamp program. Ed gave Carnac 18 envelopes and asked him to frame his predictions in the form of a Motown song title to capture how staff in the food stamp program would talk if Motown administered the program (the conference was built around Motown themes). Inside the envelope was a correlating phrase that described the food stamp program as we know it today. Below are Carnac's predictions and the messages inside the envelope. Readers please note—this will make the most sense if you know eligibility. If you don't, get hold of an eligibility person or just try to share in the fun.

The Prediction...Motown Style

"I Feel Good"
 "Ain't That Peculiar?"
 "Please Mr. Postman"
 "ABC, Easy as 1, 2, 3"
 "I'll Be There"
 "It Takes Two"
 "You Can't Hurry Love"

 "Too Busy Thinking About My Baby"
 "The Way you Do the Things You Do"
 "What's Going On?"
 "Shop Around"
 "Money, That's What I Want"
 "How Sweet it is to be Loved by You"
 "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours"
 "I Can't Help Myself"
 "I Heard it Through the Grapevine"
 "You Really Got A Hold on Me"
 and "Stop, In the Name of Love"
 "Dancing in the Street"

Inside the Envelope...Current Food Stamp Program

A favorable quality control report
 An unfavorable QC report
 Old mail issuance procedure
 EBT, easy as 1, 2, 3
 A kinder gentler case manager in an era of welfare reform
 Purchase and prepare
 State response to federal notice of proposed rule-making for new expedited issuance timeframes
 An unacceptable response for not reporting income
 Policy eligibility manual
 Three month certifications and quarterly reporting
 Finding a Medicaid eligibility group for a food stamp family
 A request for enhanced federal funding
 State response to initial notice of food stamp liability and potential sanctions
 State's acceptance letter for terms of liabilities and reinvestment in lieu of sanctions
 An unacceptable response from an ABAWD (able-bodied adult without dependents)
 Old style food stamp outreach
 New style food stamp outreach

Michigan's staff reaction at winning the Most Improved Award for Payment Accuracy in 2001

State Disbursement Unit *continues from previous page*

waiver to give it the needed time so:

- There would be the benefit of advice and guidance from the Friends of the Court, employers and child support workers.
- The system would be coordinated with other initiatives to minimize impact on the Friends of the Court.
- Electronic commerce would be a

cornerstone to making payments less costly, more effective and easier for both payers and custodial families.

- The opportunity to engage the services of Lockheed Martin and Bank One to bring the experience of seasoned successful vendors to centralized collections.

"The SDU will accomplish

the objectives of welfare reform and respond to the needs of Michigan residents," said Dutkowski. "At the same time, the infrastructure built by the Friends of the Court will continue to be an integral part of the child support system."



FIA people

Mary Marois, director of the Leelanau-Benzie Family Independence Agency, was awarded the 2000 Public Agency Advocacy



Mary Marois

Award from the Child Welfare League of America. Marois accepted the award at CWLA ceremonies Sept. 28 in New

Orleans. "It warms my soul," Marois said of the award, for which she was nominated by the governor's office. "You will never know how honored I am to have been nominated." In her role as FIA director, Marois is part of a Leelanau County team that recently won a national award for combined human services delivery in the county.

On Sept. 5 FIA director **Douglas Howard** announced the appointment of **Steven Yager** as the agency's family advocate. "Steve Yager is an objective professional who knows the players and the system well," Howard said. "His work will complement the work of the Children's Ombudsman's Office in carrying out the commitment to child welfare advocacy." The Family Advocate reviews and recommends changes in FIA programs for children and families in the interest of streamlining and improving them. Yager has been a Peer Review Team Leader in the FIA since 1998 and worked in children's protective services and foster care licensing in Ingham and Eaton counties. He holds a bachelor's degree from Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio. "This is an exciting opportunity to be involved in improving the system," Yager said. "There's nothing more important than making sure we do all we can to protect

County director is cover subject in local magazine Chambers' story included in The Forum Magazine



Genesee County FIA director **Denise Chambers** was pictured on the cover of the July 2000 issue of The Forum Magazine, a Flint publication. A feature story in that issue discussed her role as the "first African American female director of the Genesee County Family Independence Agency." The Forum Magazine is a copyrighted publication of Detroit-based MG& Publications.

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Forummag.com
website: www.forummag.com
email: lowmilow@aol.com
Cover Design and Photography:
F. Walter Milow, Jr.

Michigan's children."

In August, Howard announced the appointments of **Joseph Satterelli** as director of the Lenawee County FIA and **Don Rewa** as director of Barry-Eaton County FIA. "I am pleased to announce these appointments," said Howard. "They are a welcome addition to the FIA management team."

Rewa, the father of three children, was most recently program manager for the Barry County Family Independence Agency from 1997 until April 2000. Prior to this appointment he served as a services supervisor from 1995 to 1997 and a volunteer coordinator from 1981 until 1995. He was formerly director of counseling and special student services for Martin High School in Michigan. Rewa holds a master's degree from Western Michigan University and a

bachelor's degree from Central Michigan University.

Satterelli, a veteran FIA employee, was most recently social services program manager at Lenawee County FIA. He previously supervised eligibility specialists, prevention and guardianship workers, adults services and migrant staff and worked in various roles in Wayne County FIA going back to 1973, when he began as an assistance payments worker. He was a police officer for the city of Jackson from 1967-71 and served in the U. S. Army from 1962-66. Satterelli earned a master's in public administration from Eastern Michigan University in 1991 and a bachelor's degree in criminal justice degree from Michigan State University in 1972.

■ There's more FIA people on page 20

Youngster makes amends for wrongdoing

Trip through small town gives opportunity to admit wrong, seek forgiveness

By Chuck Amman, Director
Shawono Center, Grayling
Telephone (517) 344-5008

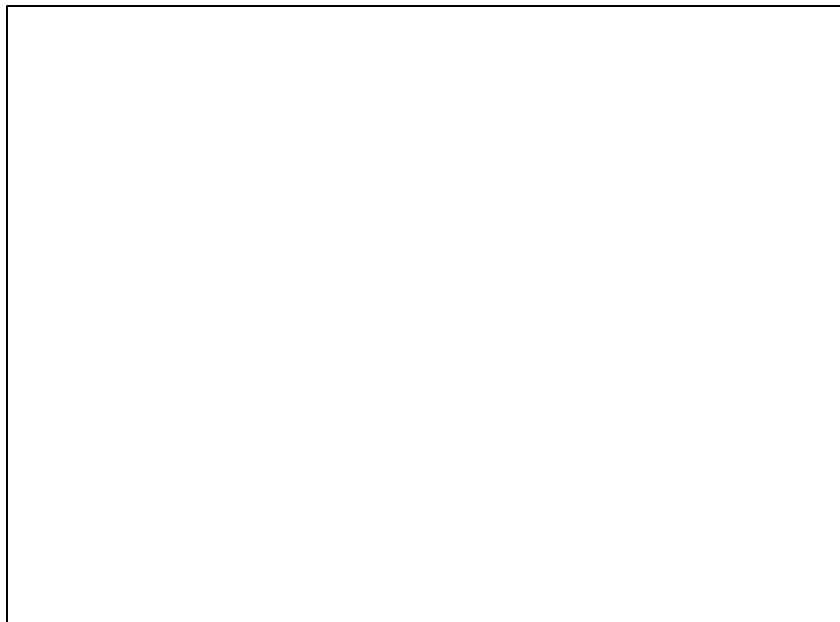
GRAYLING—A brief trip to the doctor in late summer became an occasion to seek redemption for a young man in FIA custody.

On Sept. 6, Shawono Center youth specialists Paul Bertrand and Rebecca Machtel accompanied three residents to a medical review/psychiatric appointment in Cadillac. On their return trip driving through the small town of Manton, staff and youth commented that this was where one of the youngsters had committed a crime and maybe this would be a good time to make amends for his actions.

Making amends for wrongdoing is a part of the “balanced and restorative justice” philosophy carried out in FIA juvenile services. Face-to-face meetings between victims and the perpetrator, if deemed appropriate, play a major role to bring healing and closure to both the injured party and the youth responsible for the crime.

The youth, John (not his real name), who is on release status, indicated his desire to follow through with his treatment and apologize to his victim. So the group stopped at the small museum in Manton and went in looking for the caretaker.

When John was 12 years old



he was at a camp nearby and his camp group came to visit the museum. While there, John picked up an axe that was part of an exhibit, and when told to put it down, went into a rage and started smashing the glass display cases. When sheriff's deputies arrived, John's final swing was into the desk of the man in charge.

That was John's crime that he sought to make good on to the museum caretaker. But the person working in the museum was not the same caretaker from five years ago. However, when John explained why he was there, the gentleman motioned down the corridor to another man at the back of the museum.

This indeed was the former caretaker, and John explained to him who he was, what he had done, and how he had been in a treatment program for the past year and was now getting ready to leave. John said

that he had been thinking about the harm he had done in the museum five years ago and wanted to apologize before he left the area.

After hearing his admission, the former caretaker came to tears, telling John he often prays for him and has wondered for years what had ever happened to that “angry young man”. The two talked a bit more and

the gentleman showed John where he marked the last place on his desk John's axe left its bite. He told John the mark and his apology are now part of the history of Manton.

By now, John was also shedding a few tears and offered to send the caretaker his picture and a letter of apology to go with the axe mark before leaving Shawono Center. John did indeed keep his word and sent both to the museum.

Shawono Center staff and youth are proud of John's actions during their impromptu visit. And I am as well.

Note: This story is authentic. John's name was changed to protect his identity and the confidentiality of his case.

Shawano Center in Grayling is an FIA-operated residential detention and treatment center serving adjudicated felons and youth awaiting court hearing or placement decisions. It has a capacity of 40 and can serve both males and females with secure detention and treatment beds.

The State Plate

Michigan Commission for the Blind business program celebrates first anniversary in October

By Constance Zanger

Michigan Commission for the Blind

Telephone (517) 373-2062

LANSING—On your next business trip to Lansing you are invited to visit The State Plate, a cafeteria-style food service restaurant located in the lobby of the House of Representatives building on Capitol Avenue.



Michigan farmers are not the only businesses promoting Michigan foods. The deli style cafeteria is satisfying customer appetites with a variety of homegrown Michigan foods featured on its menu. While located in the House of Representatives building, the café also serves the public during its weekdays hours of operation from 7 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Opened with fanfare on Oct. 20, 1999, the facility is operated by the MCB Business Enterprise Program, which also operates snack stands in state and federal buildings around the state.

Conceived under the direction of the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) and Farmington

continues next page

Located in the year-old State Representatives Building on Capitol Avenue in Lansing (above), The State Plate incorporates New York deli décor with home-grown Michigan foods. It offers a wide range of food including the State Plate Special, Capitol Entree, Pizza Express, on-display cooking, Happy Heart menu items, a full service bakery including bagels, muffins, cookies and bread, and a beverage center. While the facility provides special service to House of Representatives staff, it is open to the public weekdays from 7 a. m. to 3 p. m. Bon appetit!



FIA wins health in workplace award

Agency is one of 28 award winners from Governor's Council on Physical Fitness

Information: Brenda McGuire

Telephone (800) 434-8642

In Lansing call 347-7891

Internet: www.michiganfitness.org

Email: dwaldo@michiganfitness.org

LANSING—The state Family Independence Agency was awarded a Silver Healthy Workplace Award for its in-house health promotions in September. The award was one of 28 given to Michigan businesses that have shown outstanding commitment to the health of their employees by establishing creative worksite healthy promotion programs with demonstrated success.

The awards were given by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports, a Lansing-based organization dedicated to help Michigan citizens improve their health. The award program is administered through regional fitness councils of the Michigan Fitness Foundation.

The FIA won for its 1999 in-house health programs including Six Weeks to Wellness, Feel Like a Million, participation in the National Depression Screening Project, and for taking advantage of information posted on its Internet system. The FIA has had its program for 8 years.

The Silver Awards recognized workplaces that have sustained participation or comprehensive programs in physical fitness, health and sports. Representatives from the FIA and other winning companies were honored at the council's annual banquet Oct. 16 in Lansing. Francisca Vasconcellos coordinates the FIA programs.

With 12,755 employees, the FIA was by far the largest employee organization receiving a Silver Award. The second-largest organization has 2,600 employees.

The State Plate *continued from previous page*

Hills-based food services consulting company McVety & Associates, The State Plate is the first new cafeteria-style facility opened by the Commission for the Blind in nearly 10 years. As part of its mission to provide opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals to achieve employability and function independently, the MCB oversees the development and operation of food service and vending facilities at state and federal buildings in Michigan through the Business Enterprise Program. The program is the largest single employer of blind individuals in the state and currently oversees operations at more than 100 locations statewide.

The State Plate incorporates the décor of a New York deli with homegrown Michigan foods. It offers a wide range of delicious foods including the State Plate Special (deli-gourmet salads), Capitol Entrees (hot entrée table), Pizza Express, on-display cooking, Happy Heart menu items, a full service bakery including bagels, muffins, cookies and bread, and a beverage center.

In addition to seating for more than 100 people on the premises, The State Plate offers catering and food delivery services to the 700 staff in the House of Representatives building where it is located.

As part of The State Plate's initiative to market Michigan produce, Patrick McGlinchey, owner and operator of The State Plate, is planning to invite Michigan state representatives to submit recipes to be prepared as special menu items in the cafeteria.

"I am pleased to be managing

the newest cafeteria operated by the Michigan Commission for the Blind, continuing a 15-year association I have had operating facilities under the commission's direction," said McGlinchey, who is legally blind. "The State Plate offers a wide range of products and services for a cafeteria of its kind."

The State Plate concept was conceived by McVety & Associates, a food service consulting company that has worked with the Michigan Commission for the Blind for eight years developing food service facilities in the state. Following a survey and meetings with a visually impaired focus group, McVety & Associates designed The State Plate as an upscale cafeteria that would meet the needs of its patrons as well as those of its visually impaired employees.

McVety & Associates incorporated several special amenities to ensure that McGlinchey and his staff are able to prepare and serve The State Plate specialties without difficulty.

"In addition to incorporating talking cash registers and other equipment needed by the visually impaired staff, we have applied the same design principles to The State Plate that we would consider for our business and upscale restaurant clients," said Jerry McVety, president of McVety & Associates. "People eating at The State Plate will enjoy an exciting, colorful environment with first class food and services."

For more information visit The State Plate website at www.relative-design.com and click "The State Plate" or e-mail them at stateplate@relative-design.com

Macomb County welcomes CSES

**Michigan's 3rd most populous county successfully links to statewide system
Partnership between county, state, Friend of the Court critical to success**

By Kathy St. Divine
Michigan Child Support Enforcement System

On August 7, the Macomb County Friend of the Court became the 73rd county to install Michigan's Child Support Enforcement System. With nearly 800,000 residents, Macomb is the most populous county to install CSES in Michigan.

Mandated by federal legislation, CSES is an electronic data system with a goal to establish a uniform child support collection and data network throughout the state. It is administered through the FIA and the system is being instituted through county Friend of the Court offices.

In Macomb County, Lynn Davidson of the Friend of the Court attributed the successful conversion to the combined efforts of three agencies: the 16th Judicial Circuit Court, the Macomb County Friend of the Court and their Management Information Services Department, and Michigan's Child Support Enforcement System.

"The staffs of all three agencies worked very diligently to complete the conversion process," said Davidson.

Preparation was a key contributor to successful conversion in Macomb County, which changed from a county-based system to the statewide CSES system. Macomb County staff dedicated enormous effort to prepare 35,000 child support cases for conversion. The hard work paid dividends for Macomb County staff and customers.

"The initial phase of conversion from a Friend of the Court based computer system to the state CSES system appears successful," said

Chief Judge Peter J. Maceroni of the 16th Judicial Court. "My main objective is to complete the conversion with minimal impact to the citizens of the county."

Thanks to important help from other CSES counties, Davidson said that goal was accomplished. "The transition process was smooth with minor difficulties encountered and corrective measures taken," she said.

Washtenaw, Monroe and Tuscola counties all chipped in over the weekend of August 12-13 to help eliminate a backlog in payments. "Their help was invaluable," said Davidson. "We were able to eliminate our backlog in the first weekend."

Overall, the Friend of the Court office experienced a very smooth conversion and implementation. The Macomb staff of more than 100 became familiar with the CSES application during "practice lab"—a computer laboratory set up to mirror their own office and data in order to provide hands-on experience with the CSES application.

Kim Summers, the state's CSES Implementation Team Leader, said the transfer succeeded in part because Macomb County staff wanted it to work.

"The positive attitude of Friend of the Court management and

staff resulted in a composed and satisfied office environment from the first day they began using CSES," said Summers.

Macomb's impressive beginning included a financial staff that receipted 92 percent of their daily average – on the first full day using CSES. A week after conversion, Macomb Friend of the Court was current in receipting payments.

Stated another way, receipting was about 8 percent behind normal volumes during the first week of conversion. After a week, all cases and payments were current. This achievement was made possible by the cooperation and assistance Macomb received from other counties that have implemented CSES.

As a final note, Macomb was also the successful FormScape pilot site. It is the first CSES county to be able to use FormScape, new software that allows professional appearing forms to be printed from CSES by providing the ability to use different fonts and font sizes, lines and some graphics.

Congratulations, Macomb County Friend of the Court, for a job well done!

■ **For questions about the Macomb County conversion please contact:**
Kim Summers, Michigan CSES Implementation Team Leader.
Telephone: (517) 241-9658
Email: summersk@cses.central



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Chief Information Officer

FIA "makes a difference" in Michigan

Agency a prime sponsor for statewide Make A Difference Day activities

The 2000 observance is on Oct. 28

By Mary Grill, acting director
Outreach and Fund Development
Michigan Community Service Commission
Telephone (517) 335-7875
grillm@state.mi.us

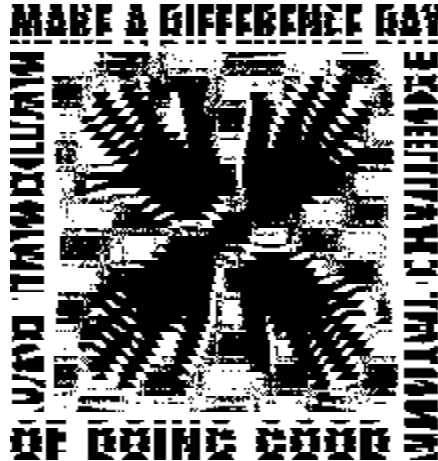
Last year 14 million people in need of help received 4 million helping hands from 2 million people throughout the country...in a single day! How is this possible? For the last ten years—in the spirit of goodness—on the fourth Saturday of October people volunteer in their communities on Make A Difference Day, the nationally recognized day of doing good.

On Saturday, Oct. 28 everyone will again have the opportunity to be part of the growing population that enjoy serving their neighbors. In Michigan alone, it is estimated that over 75,000 volunteers will participate in more than 500 Make A Difference Day projects benefiting more than 150 communities.

In its strong tradition of service, 15 Family Independence Agencies recruited over 2,000 volunteers to participate in "MDDay" projects in 1999. Some of these events included:

- Communities held food, personal needs, blood drives and clothing drives.
- People painted senior citizens' homes, cleaned beaches, rivers, and parks.
- Volunteers hosted health fairs for youth, teens, and seniors.
- Halloween activities of all sorts, for "children of all ages", were sponsored by FIA offices and other partnering organizations.

The Michigan Family Independence Agency is one of the statewide organizations leading the charge in Michigan. Other statewide



sponsors are the Michigan Community Service Commission, Council of Michigan Foundations, Michigan Campus Compact, Michigan State

University Extension, Volunteer Centers of Michigan, and United Way of Michigan. Nationally, MDDay is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation and USA Weekend Magazine.

In 2000, YOU can help "make a difference" in your community by organizing and/or participating in a service project on MDDay.

MDDay project planning packets are available to assist you in planning your volunteer service project. To acquire contact Kathie at the Michigan Community Service Commission at (517) 373-4200 or email at vasilionk@state.mi.us

Engler announces funding to reduce teen pregnancy

Eight communities to receive up to \$8 million

Governor John Engler announced July 20 that up to \$8 million will be awarded to reduce teen pregnancy rates in eight school communities in Michigan. The funding comes from a 1999 federal bonus Michigan received as a result of successfully reducing out-of-wedlock births.

"We were extremely pleased to be one of four states and the District of Columbia to receive bonus dollars from the federal government in recognition of our significant reduction in out-of-wedlock births," said Engler. "By reducing out-of-wedlock births, we are also helping to reduce dependence on welfare and increase personal responsibility."

"By awarding these dollars to school communities that still have a large number of teen births, we can have a direct and positive impact on the lives of young people," said Engler.

Funds of up to \$1 million will be made available over two school years to the school communities of Benton Harbor, Flint, Jackson, Muskegon, two school communities within the City of Detroit and two other school communities within Wayne County. The City of Detroit and Wayne County will soon identify school communities within their systems for this project.

continues on back page

Cinderella completes her degree

Agreement between Marygrove College and Wayne County serves FIA employees through child welfare trainee grant project

If it were a fairy tale, it might be Cinderella. If it were a news story the lead might say, "Student starts college on academic probation with 1.7 GPA, graduates magna cum laude with a 3.85 grade point average and delivers commencement address."

This is not a fairy tale but the real life experience of **Phyllis Edwards**, a family independence manager in the Wayne County Magnolia district office, who was a "Cinderella" as a student in the Marygrove College under its agreement with the Wayne County FIA child welfare trainee program.

The federally funded bachelor of social work degree program, now in its third year, allows FIA employees to pursue a work-study curriculum in which they complete bachelor's requirements in two and one-half years, including summers. Participants continue employment with Wayne County FIA on a permanent intermittent basis (between 20-40 hours per week) while taking a minimum of nine credit hours of classes per semester. Each employee is awarded a stipend to help with the cost of tuition, books and fees.

Phyllis, who was awarded her bachelor's degree in social work in May 1999, attributes her success after a shaky beginning to, in her words: "The professors who cared about you and your success. If there is any potential in you, they will definitely pull it out. The great strength of this program is the one-on-one support to students. There is nothing that you may have needed that wasn't provided." She cited tutorial services in math, English and

computer skills as examples.

Phyllis is one of nine WCFIA employees who are realizing their career goals while making a name for themselves and the quality of FIA staff on the campus of the Detroit college. They have all earned bachelor's degrees in social work through the program within the past three years.



Phyllis Edwards

There are 10 other Wayne County FIA employees who are current students. Among the nine graduates, seven earned their degrees with honors—three magna cum laude (with high honors) and four cum laude, or with honors.

"There is great camaraderie among this group," Phyllis said. "We support each other. This bond is also an asset of the program and contributes to the success of the students."

She noted that most of the nine graduates have gone on to pursue master's degrees. In addition to excelling in academics, all nine graduates were active in the community through memberships in the college chapter of the Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) and/or Phi Alpha, a national social work honor society, and Network, another social work organization. Their

activities have included conducting fundraising activities for Interim House, a domestic violence shelter, and collecting toys and clothing for abused and neglected children.

"Our professors got us involved in community service," Phyllis said. "They made sure we became very well-rounded and self-assured."

Students must have a 3.5 GPA or better to be eligible for membership in Phi Alpha. Attesting to the excellence of Wayne County FIA students, the Marygrove chapter president of Phi Alpha has been a Wayne County employee enrolled in the program since its inception in 1996.

Since Phyllis earned her degree, she has been promoted twice within the agency – from a family independence specialist to a child welfare specialist, then to a FIM – after previous unsuccessful interviews for promotion. "The Marygrove-Wayne County FIA program equipped me with the tools and skills to be a manager," Phyllis said.

As a student at Marygrove, Phyllis was president of ABSW, vice president of Phi Alpha and National Association of Social Work, and student social worker of the year for Marygrove. Phyllis is working on a master's degree in social work at Wayne State University with a concentration in community organiza-

L. O. News is Good News

The latest news from local offices.....

FIELD OPERATIONS ADMINISTRATION / WAYNE COUNTY

tion and social justice. She was awarded the Professional Graduate Scholarship to cover graduate tuition at WSU. Her plan for the future is to open a residential facility for siblings in foster care that provides supportive social work and educational services. The other WCFIA graduates are: **Cynthia Glover**, the first program graduate, who completed bachelor's degree requirements cum laude in May 1998 and was promoted from a FIS to a child welfare specialist. She is presently a family independence manager in the Wayne County FIA Tireman district office. Cynthia began work on her master's degree in social work at Wayne State in June.

Ava Thomas, a child welfare specialist in the South Central Child and Family Services (CFS) district office, Detroit, who graduated cum laude in December 1999. While a student, she served as ABSW vice president, Phi Alpha president and was an active member of Network. She was promoted from a FIS to her current position after receiving her degree. She is enrolled in the master's program at Wayne State, with a concentration in family, children and youth.

Emery Allen, one of the first recipients of the award, received her bachelor's degree in December 1998 and was promoted to a child welfare specialist. She is on the staff of the Western Wayne Child and Family Services district office in Taylor. Emery was an active member of ABSW and Network as a student. She has applied for graduate school at both the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

Theresa Dawson graduated magna

cum laude in May 1999 and went immediately to Wayne State University where she completed master's degree in social work requirements this May. While at Marygrove she received numerous awards including being named to "Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges". She is a former treasurer of Phi Alpha. Theresa is an eligibility specialist in the Wayne County FIA East McNichols district office, Detroit.

Jeannine Irvine, child welfare specialist in the Western Wayne CFS district, Taylor, is another magna cum laude graduate of Marygrove College. She received her bachelor's degree in May 1999 and was promoted to her current position from a FIS. She also served as president of Phi Alpha and was an active member of ABSW and Network. Jeannine began graduate studies in June at Wayne State University.

Hedy Alexander graduated in May 1999 and was awarded her master's in social work degree from Wayne State this past May. While a Marygrove student, Hedy was active in both ABSW and Network. She is a FIS in the Fullerton district office, Detroit.

Sandra Eberhardt graduated cum laude from Marygrove in December 1999. Sandra served as president of Phi Alpha and was an active ABSW member. She is a child support specialist in the Office of Child Support at the Wayne County FIA Medbury district office in Detroit. She plans to start graduate school next year.

Lucinda Conner, a FIS in the Kercheval-Townsend district office in

Detroit, was awarded her bachelor's degree cum laude at Marygrove's May 2000 commencement. She is also a former Phi Alpha president. She plans to pursue a position in CFS and eventually have her own consulting business.

Scheduled to graduate in December 2000 is **Lisa Gray**, family aide with 24-hour protective services, Central Operations CFS, Detroit. Lisa is an active member of ABSW and plans to continue her education in social work at Wayne State University.

Other current Wayne County FIA students attending Marygrove are **Harriet Cutright**, Maddelein district office; **Brenda Daniels**, Medbury district; **Monica Bell**, Fort Wayne district; **Darcel Mason**, Glendale district; **Carolyn Moore**, Fullerton district; **Sherry Smith**, Lafayette district; **Winifred Wright**, Lincoln Park district; **Netha Fickling**, Hamtramck district; and **Brenda Epperson**, Magnolia district.

In collaboration with Wayne County FIA, Marygrove College applied for a third grant to enroll 11 additional students in the program. Members of the program's advisory board screen applications for admittance to Marygrove under the grant. Wayne County FIA advisoryboard members are **Allan Vermuelen**, Office of Human Resources labor relations representative; **Barbara Nelson**, section manager, South Central Child and Family Services; and **Charlene Yarbrough**, services worker on leave with UAW Local 600.

-- Patricia Perry
Wayne County FIA, Detroit
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Agencies celebrate 10th anniversary of ADA

Federal disability statute became law of the land for a decade in July

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Sparks from fireworks weren't the only flames for celebrating independence in July. Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), created motivation to keep the "flame of independence" burning for Michigan residents with disabilities. Staff and managers from Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) participated in the anniversary celebration.

Several disability organizations teamed up at the state Capitol to celebrate the Americans with Disabilities Act, the federal law signed in July 1990 to guarantee equal access to employment, state & local activities, public transportation, public accommodations & communications.

The week long event not only gave individuals the opportunity to celebrate but also to increase the public's awareness about people with disabilities and understanding of the ADA, which is the primary goal of the ADA Steering Committee.

"My main goal as a representative for the ADA Steering Committee is to serve as liaison for different activities that will promote ADA awareness and keep the Michigan Commission for the Blind informed about things that the commission needs to be aware of," said Dee Robertson, MCB Deaf-Blind Unit specialist and vocational rehabilitation counselor in Lansing.

"I also make sure that the commission is informed about the challenges the ADA is currently facing in the courts and the different process being made to help keep the flame of independence burning and alive."



ability

report

Robertson said she hopes information provided at the celebration helps promote the Michigan Commission for the Blind and its role in supporting the ADA.

"A lot of people do not know the Commission for the Blind exists," she said. "My purpose for participating is to provide the public with more awareness so they will know the MCB exists and to promote the rights of people with disabilities to jobs and equal treatment in all aspects of their life."

King T. Nelson, a rehabilitation counselor for MCB in Detroit and former client, said the Americans with Disabilities Act, in conjunction with the services provided by MCB, has paved the way for his success as a citizen with a vision impairment.

"When someone tells me that I cannot do a job because I am blind, the doors that ADA has opened up for me and the training provided by MCB gives me the opportunity to prove that I am capable and able to perform even with my disability," said Nelson.

He said the blind community needs to be involved with MCB because the contact is vital to their success and independence.

"The Michigan Commission for the Blind serves as a vehicle that drives people with vision impairments to a road of independence and employability. Personally, without the skills of blindness training, personal

adjustment, and other rehabilitation training, I would have not been able to obtain employment," said Nelson.

Some of the Michigan Commission for the Blind clients participated in the ADA celebration and expressed their feelings about the event.

"I participated in the Youth Leadership Program and it helped me meet a diverse group of people with disabilities with the same feelings that I have. I did not have a clear understanding about the different laws. Now that I have learned about ADA, I understand my rights as a person with a vision impairment," said Kimberly Borowicz, an 18-year-old Lake Orion resident and MCB client.

Borowicz said she would take back all the information she has learned about people with disabilities to her community and school - hoping to educate the public about blindness and other disabilities.

Educating oneself and the public about laws and services available to people with disabilities is an important factor for people with disabilities.

"Laws such as the ADA have allowed the Michigan Commission for the Blind and its consumers to achieve our goal of employment and independence in society with less stress," said Betty Rush, a vocational rehabilitation counselor for MCB in Detroit.

Federal welfare reform celebrates 4th anniversary

Michigan residents trade welfare for self-sufficiency

Governor John Engler celebrated the fourth anniversary of federal welfare reform and Michigan's leadership role in welfare reform programs and called on the federal government to help maintain the success by reauthorizing the TANF block grant program when it expires in 2002.

The federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant program, was authorized for six years on Aug. 22, 1996.

"Michigan and several other states began experimenting with welfare reform in the early 1990s. The 1996 congressional action truly opened up the opportunity for national success in welfare reform," said Engler Aug. 21. "Today, our program helps Michigan citizens pursue their economic dreams, not welfare dependency."

Engler said the result is an unprecedented drop in welfare caseloads, which have declined by 70 percent in Michigan and 50 percent nationally. In August, the Family Independence Program caseload was 68,015, the lowest since 1970.

"When the U.S. Congress ended the welfare entitlement in 1996, the goal was clear: reduce the number of families receiving public assistance checks. In Michigan, our program has succeeded magnificently.

"Our caseload has decreased in 73 out of the last 77 months and the number of people living on what was AFDC is less than anytime since 1969. We have achieved the goals of the U. S. Congress. Our reward should be the continued ability to create winning programs."

FIA director Douglas E.

Howard said Michigan would spend more in fiscal year 2000 on child day care than cash assistance. "Our progress is the result of new policy and new perspectives," said Howard. "We have shifted from a program that used to pay people to stay home to one that supports them at work." Howard said innovative programs have spurred success everywhere including:

Project Zero

Project Zero, a pilot program soon to be expanded statewide, that supports local efforts that assist welfare customers in overcoming barriers to employment. Through mid-September, 65 of 89 Project Zero sites have achieved "zero", a point in time when all work-ready cases are working and earning income. This includes 49 counties and 16 of 23 Wayne County districts, many representing low-income Detroit neighborhoods.

"Project Zero works everywhere because communities are involved," Howard said. "When our customers in Detroit can't get to jobs in the suburbs, we work with the Department of Transportation and local companies to contract for bus service. When there is no child day care service available, we work with Community Coordinated Child Care to develop resources and empower our customers to hire family members. When employers can't find enough workers to meet their needs, we let them recruit from the lobbies of our buildings.

"If you aren't convinced welfare reform works, ask one of the more than 260,000 Michigan families who have moved from welfare to work under our reforms."

Family Independence Summer Project

The June 2000 Family Independence Summer Project was a special one-time program geared to families on welfare that didn't have jobs or earnings.

"Work strengthens families, but sometimes we have to strengthen families to move them to work, and that's what the summer project is about," said Howard. "We focused on serving the whole family, not just the head of a household."

The project served 2,216 families in 12 large counties during the summer months. Project components included individual and family goal setting, GED completions, academic programs for youth and adults, computer skills, home management and parenting skills.

Electronic Benefits Transfer

Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), another requirement of the federal welfare reform act, started in June in Jackson County. Under EBT, cash assistance and food stamp benefits are delivered by debit card, not by checks and coupons. The program has started very successfully in Jackson County and will be expanded statewide over the next year. "This benefits retailers, customers and taxpayers," said Howard.

"We aren't done," said Engler. "We are working with members of Congress and the federal government to increase our program flexibility and maintain adequate funding levels. This is critical to our continued success in strengthening families and sustaining them in employment."

■ For more information visit the FIA website at www.mfia.state.us

Funding dedicated to help reduce teen pregnancy

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The Michigan Department of Community Health, the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Family Independence Agency have worked collaboratively on developing and implementing the teen pregnancy reduction project.

"We have made great progress in reducing teen pregnancy," said Department of Community Health Director James K. Haveman, Jr. "However, there are some areas where teen pregnancy rates are much higher than the state average, which is why this funding and strong community efforts will be so significant."

"Schools play an important role in the lives of our young people," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Arthur Ellis. "School districts will serve as key partners in this initiative to reduce teen pregnancy."

Communities will develop programs with a proven track record for reducing teen births. Projects may include abstinence education, before and after school activities, personal responsibility including the Living Doll, mentoring programs, parental involvement and communication training, school health services, school-based or home visitation nursing and counseling, volunteering, child support curriculum and the responsibilities of parenting.

"We are giving flexibility to the local communities to develop the programs and interventions that will be most effective in their own communities," said FIA director Doug Howard. "We hope this will allow more partners to become involved."

Communities seeing positive results in their rates of teen pregnancy over the course of the project could earn bonus payments. For at least a 10 percent improvement in community teen pregnancy rates, the school district would receive \$300,000. For at least a 20 percent improvement, the incentive payment would be \$400,000 and for an at least 30 percent improvement the incentive payment would be \$500,000. Projects are expected to start at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year.

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